REFLECTIONS ON Growth Number 7, April 2005

Intensive Programs of Growth

In the few months since our letter dated 28 November 2004, nearly 100 additional intensive programs of growth have been or are in the process of being launched throughout the world. Although in some clusters the friends felt that the conditions were not "perfect" for initiating such a program, they were, in fact, often more propitious than expected and the results have been uniformly encouraging. As has been the case with each movement of a cluster to a new stage of activity, the launching of an intensive program of growth brings about a change in the focus and dynamics of the cluster. The challenge that a growth program places before the believers, the systematic planning in which the institutions and individuals take part, and the increase in the number of friends participating in the launch meeting and in the teaching teams, all combine to bring about a heightened motivation and enthusiasm for teaching and consolidation activities.

Whether the aim of an intensive program of growth is primarily to expand the community of interest or to directly enroll new believers, in every case we are observing that the two- to three-week intensive teaching phase achieves its stated purpose—intensification. In the West and in the East, in both urban and rural settings, the number of new contacts or enrollments garnered during the intensive teaching phase often outstrips the results of the previous twelve months. Central to the effectiveness of both the intensive teaching and consolidation phases is the ongoing training that must take place, initially to offer refresher courses to better equip believers for home visits or to participate in teaching teams, and throughout the consolidation phase, to provide opportunities for new friends and their children to become involved immediately in core activities.

This issue of the newsletter shares in some detail the experience of three clusters at different stages of an intensive program of growth: the organization of the planning phase, the results of the intensive teaching phase of the first cycle, and the efforts required to advance a cluster through three cycles of a growth program. Following these selections are brief snippets on the status of a number of intensive programs of growth well under way in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Now that a great number of intensive programs of growth have been launched in a variety of clusters, incorporating various teaching approaches, the learning we are acquiring is growing at a rapid rate. We hope that sharing these accounts with you will prompt an analysis of the situation in clusters in your region and give impetus to additional intensive programs of growth so that by the end of this year the numbers will soar.

A WELL-PLANNED LAUNCH

Atlanta, Georgia, United States

Atlanta, Georgia, hometown of CNN and Coca-Cola, is a progressive metropolis that has had a dynamic Bahá'í community for many years, especially known for its tireless work to heal the gap between the white and black communities. No wonder then that it was one of the early communities in the United States to become an "A" cluster. But capitalizing upon this energy in a cluster that already had nine functioning Local Spiritual Assemblies and a multitude of

Bahá'í activities under way presented special challenges of coordination and planning. Fortunately, it had help from its Regional Bahá'í Council, which hosted a meeting for all of the cluster growth teams in its "A" clusters. This weekend-long session provided opportunities for the team from Atlanta to learn from the other teams about launching an intensive program of growth. (It is worth mentioning that the Regional Council supported the efforts of its "A" clusters by having one of its members attend the launch of each of the growth programs in its region. And, for good measure, the Council sent bouquets of flowers to each gathering.)

During the month leading up to the regional meeting of advanced clusters, the institutions in the Atlanta cluster had already begun collaborating and studying the guidance of the Bahá'í World Centre in order to begin laying out plans for its intensive program of growth. They assessed their available human resources, for example, the number of believers who had completed the sequence of courses, the number of tutors, the number of friends willing to teach children's classes or hold devotional gatherings, and so forth. The Cluster Growth Team, in consultation with the Auxiliary Board member and institute coordinators, discussed receptive populations and unanimously agreed upon a target neighborhood. There would be three parts to the expansion phase: an intensive prayer campaign including devotional gatherings, a fireside campaign, and a teaching campaign. In the consolidation phase that followed, home visits would be made to new believers and seekers. Everyone in the cluster would have an opportunity to participate in some aspect of the growth program, if only the intensive prayer effort.

The Cluster Growth Team spent considerable time consulting and praying about how to get the friends not only to participate but also to feel ownership of the intensive program of growth. The response at the reflection meeting when the growth program was launched was proof that the team's prayers had been answered. Following is an exuberant account of the reflection meeting in the Atlanta cluster at which the plan for its intensive program of growth was presented.

> Midway through the meeting there was standing room only and some of the friends bubbled, "this is the largest reflection meeting we've ever had" and "I love it when we run out of chairs." Chairs were not needed for the entire meeting as we often were joyfully and enthusiastically called to our feet to sing another chorus of "I got the spirit all over me." Love and unity abounded and this first reflection meeting, which launched Cluster 99 into its intensive growth campaign, was a resounding success.
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> The gathering began with devotions and about 35 or 40 people assembled a few minutes after the starting time of 3:00 p.m. Friends continually streamed in, many coming directly from work, until more than 100 had gathered by halfway through the meeting. An Auxiliary Board member facilitated the meeting with generous help from members of the core team.
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> After devotions the Council representative was very warmly welcomed and invited to share the message from the Council. The letter was read followed by a few brief remarks intended to help the friends see Atlanta's position in the nation and the world. Translation was provided for those who spoke little or no English.
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> A PowerPoint presentation was used to slowly and thoroughly guide the friends through the plan. Extra effort was made to help them understand how the plan was devised, who was involved, the guidance that directed them, with emphasis on the special and lofty

place of the nine Local Spiritual Assemblies of the cluster. All actors were lovingly and enthusiastically recognized and many participants, especially youth, were called upon to stand and help read the PowerPoint presentation.

As we got deeper into the details of the plan, pledge sheets were passed out and the friends were encouraged to begin to note just what they could/would do in the three elements of the plan: intensive prayer, intensive firesides, and intensive direct teaching campaigns. The agenda was well organized and so was its presentation, with multiple persons taking part. Throughout the session the friends were reminded that Bahá'u'lláh was the source of power and that every effort must be made to call upon the Holy Spirit, to beg for Divine assistance every step along the way. One of the friends commented after the gathering about how clear and strategic the plan was and how much he liked it. I felt that his sentiments reflected those of all of the friends gathered at this most successful reflection gathering. No doubt, they are good to go.

But the Cluster Growth Committee felt that this wonderful beginning was not enough to ensure success. So its members visited the next Nineteen Day Feasts in the nine localities of the cluster to energize friends who had missed the reflection meeting. A gathering of all the Local Assemblies was also held two weeks after the reflection meeting so that they too would have a heightened sense of ownership of the plan and would understand their role in supporting it.

The reflection meeting was followed by a period of intensive prayer campaigns and more planning and preparation leading up to Naw Rúz. The actual teaching campaign in the target neighborhood began on the second day of the New Year—22 March. That morning the teaching teams met early for prayers and orientation at the Atlanta Bahá'í Centre, and such a gathering was repeated several other times during the first week of the campaign. The evenings were filled with the core activities. The teaching campaign adopted the logo "We R One Family" and the teachers wore buttons and used the logo on invitations.

The first three-month cycle will be completed in June and a second will begin immediately to take advantage of youth available during summer holidays. An early report of results, after one week of the intensive teaching phase, is not only exciting but reflects the heightened receptivity of the general public to the message of Bahá'u'lláh. Simple categories were used for assessing the level of response:

Total homes visited	**318**	
Not home	92	
Highly interested in the Faith *(3 stars)*	15	6.6%
Open to revisit *(2 stars)*	58	25.7%
Listened with interest *(1 star)* `	28	12.4%
Neutral *(no star)*	106	47%
Not interested	19	8.4%

During this one-week period, the potential for several children's classes has been discovered as well. One children's class has already begun in a Hispanic neighborhood, and several others are being planned.

A TEACHING CAMPAIGN WITH SUSTAINABILITY

Istanbul, Turkey

Turkey audaciously launched three intensive programs of growth within a week—the Ankara 1, Istanbul Europe, and Istanbul Anatolia clusters—and the believers were amazed at their success, especially when it looked in the beginning as if the teaching campaign would be a failure because of exceptionally bad weather.

Like all well-planned intensive programs of growth, these were preceded by careful preparations. In the previous weeks, the Auxiliary Board members, members of the Area Teaching Committees, cluster coordinators and coordinators of children's education came together several times to review Ruhi Institute Book 6, to study the 28 November letter from the International Teaching Centre about intensive programs of growth, and to consult about the teaching activities in the first cycle of growth. With this enhanced understanding, these friends set about contacting the Local Assemblies as well as the tutors and other believers to explain to them what was to take place and to elicit their support.

In hindsight, one of the keys to the success of the Turkish intensive programs of growth was the timing and careful scheduling. The reflection meetings held to launch the first cycles were held on Sundays. The five weekdays of the next week were used to hold evening refresher courses on Books 2 and 6. Then the teaching began in earnest on the next Saturday and continued until two Sundays later. Thus the two-week intensive teaching campaign began with a weekend and ended with one, in effect allowing three weekends to be included in the two-week campaign—times when the greatest number of believers were available to participate.

The reflection meetings for the launch of the intensive programs of growth were more successful than had been anticipated. Everyone who attended made a commitment to join a teaching team, not just those who had completed the sequence of courses. This level of participation was an unexpected bounty. The spirit was high and so were the expectations. But then Istanbul encountered a seemingly insurmountable obstacle just as the actual teaching work was to begin—an unusually deep snowfall blanketed the city, creating transport chaos and making movement well nigh impossible. The previously buoyant spirits of the teams began to change to despair.

Not to be defeated, the institutions consulted and agreed on a modified approach. If the teams could not travel across the city to teach, they would instead teach their families, friends, and neighbors at home using the home-visit approach. Quickly the word was spread through text messages sent by the secretaries of the two Area Teaching Committees in both clusters in Istanbul to the teaching team leaders' cell phones. It turned out that this teaching method was the most effective of all and so by concentrating upon the people whom they already knew, the results were undoubtedly greater.

A good example of these visits was one made to the family of several believers who, though Bahá'ís for many years, had ceased to participate in the community. When visited, using the approach set forth in Book 2, the faith of these dormant believers was reignited. Their children were no longer attending Bahá'í children's classes because other believers had to drive some distance to pick them up to take them to the Bahá'í Center in another part of the city. After some time, this had become too difficult to sustain. The family was asked whether they

would be willing to have children's classes in their own home. Not only were they most eager, but they were certain that the children of their neighbors and relatives would come as well. The children's class teacher, one of the visitors, realized that this would actually be less time-consuming than transporting the children to a central location, and so it was agreed on the spot. Then a family member arrived who had heard of the Faith but had never declared. She was shown an album, put together by the Area Teaching Committee for every teaching team, that contained Bahá'í quotations from Book 6 together with photographs. After a discussion about the Faith, she said she would like to become a Bahá'í. Hearing of the plans for a children's class, she also enthusiastically agreed to send her own children. Asked if she had ever trained her children in spiritual matters, she replied, "No." Asked if she would like to learn to teach children, she joyfully said that she would. The institute courses were then explained to her, especially Book 3. She was eager to take part in these courses. So from this simple visit, inactive believers had their faith renewed, a new soul was connected to Bahá'u'lláh, a new children's class was begun, and the commitment was made for a new study circle.

Other similarly exciting stories of home visits came from the Ankara 1 cluster:

- Another group asked an inactive believer if he could invite friends and relatives to his home for a fireside. Ten people from seven families came and enjoyed what they heard about the Faith. Three of them subsequently attended the Ayyám-i-Há celebration and the Naw Rúz Feast and enrolled.
- Another teaching team's home visit to an inactive believer resulted in the declaration of her son and daughter. The team was received with much warmth and friendship.
- A Bahá'í family arranged a fireside for their neighbor who had already expressed interest in the Faith. She said, "I have devoted my life to help the people, to the benefit of all, and God, as a return, He led me to meet you. It is a prize for me." She declared as did her two young sons who were also listening carefully to the presentation.
- A teaching team went to visit a Bahá'í family with the purpose of visiting their sixteen-year old son who had not yet become a Bahá'í. As one of the team members related the story, "This was our plan. But Bahá'u'lláh changed our plans. The cousins of the host Bahá'í friend came from Istanbul to visit them in Ankara. We would teach the Cause to them. We felt that this was the thing wanted of us . . . At the same time I was worrying that the family's son could not declare while they were present there. Suddenly these two guests stood up and left the room where we were talking. Then the son entered and we started to talk to him about declaration; he said that he wanted to become a Bahá'í, and declared. All of us stood up to congratulate him. When we sat back down, the two guests from Istanbul entered the room again. We didn't know why they left the room a few minutes ago. It was like a small miracle. Then we started teaching them. They stated that they shared our views and they wanted to meet the Bahá'ís in Istanbul."

The enthusiasm generated by the teaching campaigns in the three clusters was infectious. In fact, the National Spiritual Assembly of Turkey itself decided to postpone one of its meetings so that its members could continue to participate in the intensive teaching campaigns. Even when the two weeks came to an end, the participants continued to carry pamphlets with them and were eager to turn every encounter—whether shopping for food or traveling in a taxi—into a true teaching encounter. As one report put it, "teaching indeed became 'the dominating passion of the lives of the believers'!"

One veteran teacher who had taken part in teaching campaigns in previous years and who participated in the campaign in Istanbul compared earlier teaching campaigns with the intensive program of growth. He noted that in the past, teaching campaigns mainly took place in the summer months for brief periods, and the teachers knew that when they left, those whom they were interacting with, would not have any follow-up until the teachers themselves returned. Most of the previous campaigns he had participated in had been more proclamation than teaching and there was little to offer new declarants or seekers—usually no children's classes, devotional meetings, or activities for junior youth and youth. In contrast, the Istanbul campaign was a success in the middle of a snowstorm! There was an infrastructure in place so that the new declarants or seekers would not be forgotten once the teacher returned home. There were real activities for seekers and their families through which they could receive spiritual nourishment. But he was especially impressed that the members of the teaching teams in Turkey were really teaching the verities of the Faith and answering the questions of seekers in careful, effective ways, not simply giving information. The unity of thought of the believers in all three clusters during the intensive program of growth was especially impressive. Everyone had the same vision, the same training, the same goals.

The following chart illustrates the accomplishments of the three clusters during the intensive teaching phase.

Cluster	**Istanbul Europe 5-27 Feb. 2005**	**Istanbul Anatolia 5-27 Feb. 2005**	**Ankara 1 12-27 Feb. 2005**	**Total**
Number of teaching teams	11	16	20	47
Number of friends who participated in the teaching teams	72	62	53	187
Persons taught	398	340	221	959
Home visits conducted	46	115	153	314
New community of interest	121	135	60	316
Community of interest integrated into study circles	22	135	54	211
Declarations	12	5	23	40
New study circles formed	6	29	16	51
New devotional meetings	1	16	1	18
New children's classes	1	3	1	5

The teaching did not stop after the first two intensive weeks. All of the teams invited people to the Ayyám-i-Há gatherings. In Ankara 1 alone, 11 people declared during those celebrations.

THE THIRD CYCLE OF THE GROWTH PROGRAM IS COMPLETED

Murun, Mongolia

Even though the 28 November letter of the International Teaching Centre used Murun, Mongolia, as an example, it is useful to take another more detailed look at this cluster because it

is one of the furthest along in carrying out an organized intensive program of growth. It has recently completed its third cycle when most advanced clusters are still in their first cycle or only just planning to launch.

Murun is an unlikely place to be the center of attention. Even though it is the provincial capital of western Mongolia, this remote, windswept town boasts a population of only 20,000 people, and there are about 30,000 in the entire cluster. At the beginning of the Five Year Plan, there were some 20 active believers in Murun. A dedicated homefront pioneer couple, with an infant and a toddler, settled in Murun in 2002 and helped to build a community through the instrument of the institute process. When they could not attract the Bahá'ís to institute courses, they turned to their neighbors and new friends and involved them. They quickly recognized that the key to growth was raising up tutors. Gradually more and more individuals proceeded through the sequence of courses and then teaching campaigns were initiated. The core activities continued to multiply. By Riḍván of 2004, as described in our 28 November letter, the community was averaging 19 enrollments per month. In one year, 228 new believers were enrolled and 46 tutors were trained.

When the pioneer family first arrived in Murun in 2002, the Local Spiritual Assembly was not functioning. By the middle of 2003, it was beginning to function, and after Riḍván 2004, it was "putting a lot of effort into taking care of all the tasks." The Cluster Growth Committee was established for the first time in 2003 and in the beginning needed prodding and guidance from the Auxiliary Board member. But by early 2004 the Committee began to be more self-sufficient. In July 2004, a full-time secretary was appointed for the Cluster Growth Committee. A second institute coordinator was also designated so that there was now one for study circles and another for children's classes. "We learnt that if the coordination is clear, then it gives much more impetus to growth and we saw this happening in our cluster."

By the summer of 2004, the cluster was ready for its *first cycle* of an intensive program of growth. It began with an intensive institute campaign during which 25 youth finished Ruhi Institute Books 6 and 7. Then a two-week teaching campaign was carried out with more than 100 participants, 68 of whom devoted themselves full-time to the campaign. Even the Secretary of the National Teaching Committee came to Murun to assist. The campaign focused on a number of localities within the cluster and used a variety of approaches. Every household in two rural villages was visited. A public proclamation was held with 200 people in attendance, half non-Bahá'ís. At the end of the first two weeks, the Faith had been taught to 780 people, of whom 140 declared and 60 junior youth and children asked to be part of the community. These were immediately integrated into the core activities.

> When we came first to Murun, . . . our conception of a teaching campaign was linked with street teaching, that to do intensive teaching meant we would distribute introductory brochures about the Faith on the street or we would have to travel to another community. However, we realized that intensive teaching can also occur in our immediate surroundings and teaching our immediate contacts has become our habit. For this culture to take root, at least two years of constant, ceaseless and perseverant effort is required and once this culture is established, then it will be transferred to the new believers.

The *second cycle* of Murun's intensive program of growth extended from 15 August until 15 November. In the first month intensive courses on Books 3 to 7 were organized in order to increase the human resources. A notable event during this campaign was the introduction of Book 5 at the national level. This course plus a clarification of the system of children's classes

and a children's class teachers' reflection meeting helped to strengthen this important component of the second cycle of the growth program.

In the following weeks, the focus was on expanding the devotional meetings and giving more attention to home visits. During a 21-day campaign, 19 teams visited 59 homes and shared deepening themes with 247 people. The second cycle was also characterized by more in-depth consultations by the institutions in order to increase understanding of the process and sustain the momentum. Consultations among the agencies at the cluster level were organized at the beginning and end of the cycle. The institute coordination and growth committee met even more frequently. In addition, a three-day training was organized for the members of the Local Assemblies, the Cluster Growth Committee, and several assistants to the Auxiliary Board member. Besides reviewing the guidance on the Five Year Plan and intensive programs of growth, a manual for building effective teams of administrators also proved valuable.

Although new believers were being enrolled during this expansion of the core activities, the actual teaching campaign came near the end of the cycle. In the second cycle, the Bahá'í population increased by over 200 and a survey was undertaken of all the Bahá'í families. The aim of the survey was to create an accurate database and to systematize the channels for information dissemination, the distribution of the cluster newsletter, and the conducting of deepening activities.

When the *third cycle* of growth began in mid-November, consolidation activities were still in progress, so a tutor's reflection meeting was held followed by intensive courses in Books 6 and 7. The momentum of other core activities was sustained through a gathering of children's class teachers and, at the end of that weekend, a children's festival, which launched a new phase of classes for children and junior youth. The teaching campaign was planned for only 10 days and focused on teaching family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and, in particular, the parents of non-Bahá'í children in the children's classes. By this time the children's classes had risen from 34 at the beginning of the first cycle to 79 regular, sustained classes. The number of tutors rose to 123. And at the end of the cycle the Bahá'í population had passed the 1,000 mark. On 15 March 2005, the number of believers reached 2 percent of the general population of the cluster! This had been the goal—so that the Bahá'ís would become an influential mass in the population. Better yet, about 70 percent of the believers are in the institute process; over 500 have now completed Book 1; and 123 have completed the full sequence of courses. A majority of the young declarants are in junior youth classes.

The *fourth cycle* of the intensive program of growth in Murun began in March 2005. One of the things learned from the previous cycles was that it is better to retain the intensive teaching phase at the beginning of the cycle. This time it was decided to have the intensive teaching phase focus on a receptive neighborhood. The cluster reflection meeting was conducted in combination with the unit convention and was a huge gathering, so although the neighborhood approach to expansion has been a very effective growth strategy, the friends see that they have outgrown almost all of the public buildings in Murun!

But the success of the Murun cluster is not just about enrollments; it is about the transformation of people and the creation of a sustainable pattern of activity. Wherever weak areas were identified, steps were taken to modify the plan. Training was ongoing and proved to be the engine driving the entire process. And with growth comes, of course, new challenges and possibilities. The first Bahá'í-inspired social and economic development project, a community bank, has been established in the cluster. There is also a junior youth empowerment

program. The administrators—members of the Assemblies and the growth committee—are discovering the need for additional training to increase their own capacity to manage large numbers of people and activities. Each step is being analyzed. Consultation is used for planning, evaluating, and organizing. Adjustments are made and new goals set. This cluster is moving from strength to strength, proving that outstanding results are possible in the most out-of-the-way places through the power of Bahá'u'lláh.

Murun Cluster Statistics

Results of the Growth Program	First Cycle	Second Cycle	Third Cycle	Total
Teaching teams	19	30	37	86
Full-time participants	68	80	112	260
Total participants	95	80	112	287
Individuals contacted	854	587	749	2,190
New enrollments	237	142	228	607
Home visits	99	93	88	179
Individuals taught	265	220	199	419
				March 2005*
Devotional meetings	10 new	19 new	6 new	85
Children's classes	23 new	19 new	34 new	78
Study circles	17 new	34 new	24 new	67

*total number of core activities in operation as of 5 March 2005

SOME RESULTS OF OTHER INTENSIVE PROGRAMS OF GROWTH

- **Baku, Azerbaijan.** Midway in its third cycle, the friends in the Baku cluster started with a home visit campaign with the aim of visiting 80 homes. The initial report after six days of activity indicated that 18 teams had visited 28 homes, resulting in 3 new study circles.

- **Fako, Cameroon.** About 100 people were added to the community of interest and 8 declared during the first cycle. The community began 7 new study circles, 6 children's classes, and 1 devotional meeting. A second cycle began in January.

- **Pointe-Noire, Congo Republic.** During the first two weeks of the first cycle, 316 people were taught, resulting in 36 accepting the Faith. Another 176 showed sincere interest in learning more about the Faith and were followed up by 41 teachers. Prior to the launching of its first intensive program of growth in October, 23 people had accepted the Faith since April.

- **Manchester, England.** In the intensive teaching phase, 57 friends participated in 15 teaching teams; their goal of reaching 269 individuals was exceeded by more than 100, and the goal of enlarging their community of interest by 175 persons was achieved; 11 new devotional meetings and 4 study circles were begun.

- **Belonia, India.** During the initial weeks of the first cycle, 9 teams shared the Faith with 305 people, with 76 declarations. The declarations resulted from the following activities: firesides, 23; home visits, 20; individual teaching, 18; devotional meetings, 11; study circles, 4.

- **Imphal, India.** After the initial two weeks of the first cycle, there were nearly 60 declarations along with an increase of more than 300 in the community of interest.

- **Udaipur, India.** During the initial weeks of the first cycle, 12 teams taught 154 people, of whom 95 enrolled.

- **Tikrit West, Kenya.** In the second cycle, 110 friends participated in 30 teaching teams; they enlarged the community of interest by 600, enrolled 87 new believers, and began 18 new study circles, 15 children's classes, and 5 devotional meetings. In addition to teaching family and friends, the intensive phase targeted youth and women.

- **Bucharest, Romania.** The two-week expansion phase was focused principally on home visits. Over 90 home visits were conducted by the 13 teaching teams, leading to an increase in the community of interest of 51 individuals, the initiation of 6 new study circles, and a further 31 souls expected to join core activities later in the cycle.

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